The Columbia River
Improving Water Quality

Idaho DEQ, Oregon DEQ, Washington Dept. of Ecology, and US EPA Region 10
in coordination with the Columbia Basin Tribes
Joint Fact Sheet #1, Summer 2001

Improving Water Quality on the Columbia/Snake River Mainstem
An Introduction

Why improve water quality on the Columbia?

Everyone wants good water quality for the uses we enjoy such as fishing, swimming, and boating. Healthy habitat for fish and other aquatic life needs to be protected. Water Quality Standards are required under the Clean Water Act to protect and restore the health of our nation's waters. In the Pacific Northwest, the states and some tribes have adopted their own Water Quality Standards (with the approval of the US Environmental Protection Agency - EPA). Attaining water quality is especially important on the Columbia River because several species of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia Basin have been "listed" under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Most of the Columbia River Mainstem and the Lower Snake River Mainstem exceed state and/or tribal Water Quality Standards for critical periods of time (mainly in the spring and summer months) for both water temperature and total dissolved gas (TDG).

The Key Players:

The states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington, EPA Region 10, and the Columbia Basin tribes are key players. EPA will provide ongoing assistance to the states and will support the tribes consistent with the federal government's tribal trust responsibility. The Western Governors' Association (WGA) will be playing an active role in facilitating the process.

Key Products:

Temperature TMDL: EPA is assisting the states and tribes by developing a temperature TMDL for the Columbia/Snake River Mainstem. EPA will be developing the temperature TMDL in close, ongoing coordination with the three states and the Columbia Basin Tribes.

Total Dissolved Gas TMDLs: Oregon and Washington will develop TMDLs for their respective states on total dissolved gas on the Columbia/Snake River Mainstem. Separate information sheets will be developed by each state

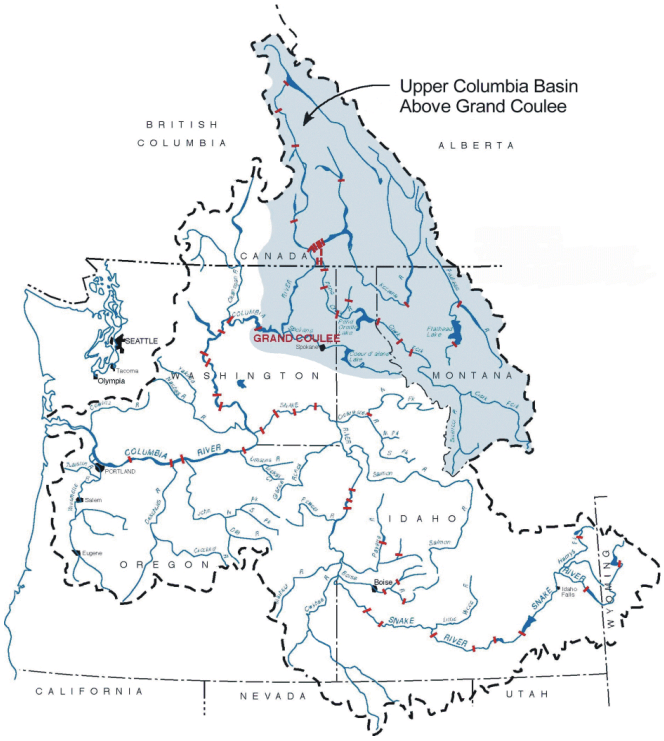
Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) - a tool for improving water quality

A TMDL is a technical analysis resulting in a document that quantifies the amount of a given pollutant (load) that can be released into a given waterbody each day while still maintaining Water Quality Standards (WQS). A TMDL also allocates responsibilities to "contributors" for reductions in the pollutant load that are necessary to achieve WQS. TMDLs are often referred to as Water Quality Improvement Plans.

TMDLs are required when waterbodies are identified as impaired waters not meeting state or tribal Water Quality Standards (often referred to as Clean Water Act Section 303(d) listed waters). The TMDLs being done for the Columbia/Snake Mainstem will determine the sources of temperature and total dissolved gas causing or contributing to water quality impairment, and

allocate responsibility for TDG and temperature reductions needed to achieve WQS.

The Columbia River Basin



Why are total dissolved gas (TDG) and temperature a problem?

Elevated levels of dissolved gas (in this case oxygen and nitrogen) and elevated water temperatures both have negative effects on the health and survival of juvenile and adult migratory fish, resident fish and other aquatic life. Fish populations in the Columbia Basin have declined significantly, due in part to unmet habitat requirements. If salmon and steelhead populations are to recover, the health of the lakes and rivers they depend on needs to be restored.

How to stay informed

First of all, make sure your name is on our mailing list. You can do this by signing in at meetings or workshops or by calling one of the contacts at the bottom of this page. You will then receive our mailings.

EPA, the states and tribes are using "pre-decisional" meetings to share information on key technical issues and decision points. These informal meetings provide a forum for constructive interaction.

Progress on the ground depends on collaboration and understanding between the public and private sectors, and concerned citizens. We recognize this will not always be easy.

Our goal is to:

- Create an open and visible decision-making process to which stakeholders and the public have equal opportunity for access and input.

- Provide a mechanism by which the public and stakeholders can stay informed and have an understanding of the process, issues, and possible solutions from perspectives of diverse interests. Incorporate public comments throughout the decision making process.

What's Next?

Future public meetings will be announced through mailings and public notices.

Future fact sheets will address issues such as the TMDL Process and Timeline, Water Quality Standards, the Temperature Model, Total Dissolved Gas, etc. Public input will help determine the fact sheets that will be most beneficial.

The TDG TMDL for the Columbia River below the confluence with the lower Snake will be completed by the end of 2001. The TDG TMDL For the Columbia and Lower Snake above the confluence with the Snake is scheduled to be completed by December 2002. The temperature TMDL is scheduled for completion by the end of 2002.

For more information

Log onto the Internet at:

www.epa.gov/r10earth/columbiamainstemtmdl.htm

Or call:

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